

*Prevention programs should be designed to enhance protective factors and move towards eliminating or reducing known risk factors.*

*Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents:  
A Research-Based Guide, NIDA (1997).*

## THE *DRAGON SLAYERS* STORY

Every two years San Diego City Schools administers the Centers for Disease Control Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to high school students. This allows the district to identify which tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs are a part of student risk behavior. In the years before the *Dragon Slayers* program, the YRBS data revealed alarming trends. The need for a comprehensive prevention program was clear.

Dr. Gilbert Botvin's *Life Skills Training* curriculum has a 15-year record of effectively reducing risk behaviors in middle and high school youth. The *Dragon Slayers* demonstration project is an adaptation of this curriculum.

The *Life Skills Training* curriculum employs a skills-based strategy for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use prevention in adolescents by addressing the underlying social and psychological causes of drug use. These factors and *Life Skills'* track record convinced San Diego City School administrators that this curriculum would effectively address their need for a prevention program at the middle school level.

### THE FINAL CHAPTER

The *Dragon Slayers* program is in the third year of the evaluation study and in the final stages of implementation. In addition to conducting a curriculum-based prevention program, a district-wide Substance Abuse policy imposes graduated sanctions for student offenders.

The *Dragon Slayers* program complements policies, practices, and integrates well with health education programs in elementary and high schools to create a comprehensive K-12 prevention program.

The *Dragon Slayers'* evaluation results are exciting and have produced valuable lessons that can assist other school districts in their efforts to incorporate comprehensive substance abuse curricula in their schools.

For more information on the *Life Skills Training* curriculum or this project, please contact:

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The *Life Skills Training* curriculum is available through:

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The author of the *Life Skills Training* curriculum is Dr. Gilbert J. Botvin.

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## ALCOHOL, TOBACCO & OTHER DRUG USE PREVENTION: A SUCCESS STORY

*LIFE SKILLS TRAINING IN SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOLS*

How did one school district successfully address the complex issue of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use prevention? With funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools program, San Diego City Schools implemented *Dragon Slayers*, an adaptation of Dr. Gilbert Botvin's *Life Skills Training* curriculum.

## FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

### A RESEARCH-BASED CURRICULUM

Dr. Botvin is a prevention researcher at Cornell University Medical College's Institute for Prevention Research. His *Life Skills Training* curriculum focuses on decreasing social and psychological factors found to promote the initiation and early stages of substance abuse, including tobacco.

The main emphasis of the program is the development of important personal and social skills such as assertiveness, communication, drug refusal, and coping with anxiety. The curriculum is taught over a period of three years in middle school, providing students with booster sessions for continuous reinforcement of skills-based learning.

Teaching the curriculum as the developer intended equals curriculum fidelity. Achieving successful outcomes with a research-based curriculum requires following the delivery guidelines closely, assuring that students receive maximum benefit.

### CERTIFIED TEACHER TRAINING

The *Life Skills Training* curriculum includes a teacher curriculum in-service conducted by certified trainers. In San Diego City Schools in-house trainers provide training on the curriculum, lesson modeling, and technical assistance to classroom teachers. The *Life Skills* teacher training is grounded in proven skills-training methods and includes practice teaching sessions and in-class role-modeled lessons.

I feel comfortable leading *Life Skills Training* role-plays. - **89%**

I feel competent to facilitate *Life Skills Training* activities. - **89%**

I feel confident I could implement *Life Skills Training* curriculum in my classroom. - **94%**

*Dragon Slayers* teacher training evaluations indicate that teachers reported high levels of comfort, confidence, and competence after attending a *Life Skills Training* in-service conducted by certified trainers. This training ultimately resulted in a high degree of curriculum fidelity.

During independent observation of the *Dragon Slayers* program, 95% fidelity to the curriculum was documented.

### SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

A *Dragon Slayers* District Staff Success Survey determined which components were critical for successful replication of the *Dragon Slayers* program.

The following are key factors that contributed to *Dragon Slayers*' success and institutionalization within San Diego City Schools:

- Adequate training and competent support personnel for the *Dragon Slayers* program.
- Clearly identified technical support.
- The program is flexible and adaptable to many needs.
- Program alignment with the philosophical value system of the District.
- A belief that the benefits of the program far outweigh its costs.
- A belief that there is a critical need for the program among the District's students.

Data indicate that all these factors should be present to optimize the successful implementation and integration of the *Life Skills Training* curriculum.



## THE RESULTS

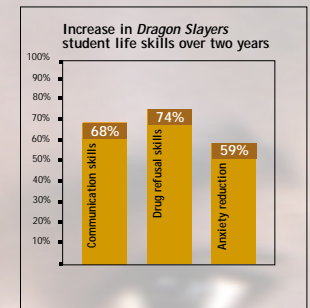
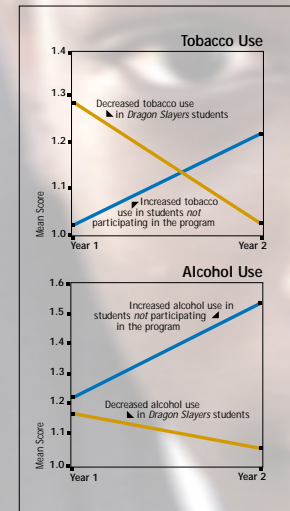
For the first time in a decade, we are seeing a reduction in high-risk behavior in students. We must focus our resources in a health model that includes effective prevention education, early intervention, and treatment. The *Dragon Slayers* program has met the test for effective prevention.

Jack Campana, Director  
San Diego City Schools,  
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### STUDENT SURVEY FINDINGS

The *Dragon Slayers* demonstration grant included an external evaluation to assess whether the program produced less adolescent alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use.

The charts below demonstrate differences in tobacco and alcohol use behaviors between *Dragon Slayers* students, and students who did not receive the curriculum.



Data trends from the *Dragon Slayers* study replicate past *Life Skills* findings. Preliminary results (year 2 of 3) demonstrate statistically significant changes in students' drug use behaviors: intention to use alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants; pro-ATOD attitudes; and general life skill levels.

*Dragon Slayers* students have higher levels of communication, anxiety reduction, and drug refusal skills than students who did not participate in the program.

*Dragon Slayers* is an effective prevention program because it deals with students' underlying motivations to use drugs and provides them with the skills necessary to resist internal and external pressures to smoke, drink, and/or use other drugs.